

*Dorothy Day*

RURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION: A PROSPECTUS

I. Background facts and assumptions.

A. The farm labor movement operates within a unique social setting. Indeed, a better <sup>term might be</sup> "a uniquely asocial setting." The attributes which make up the condition we call "social" -- group awareness, mutual purposes, division of labor, rules and statuses, etc. -- are largely missing among agricultural workers. Even those who live in close physical proximity, as in the "shacktowns" of the San Joaquin Valley, make up, at best, geographical neighborhoods and communities, but not sociological or psychological neighborhoods and communities.

B. A labor union is a relatively advanced form of human association. It may be compared to a professional athletic team. Only by years of practice does one become proficient. No one expects a group of nine untrained neophytes to become World Series contenders overnight -- or in a year, or two years.

C. A winning farm labor union presupposes a period of "training" on the part of the people involved -- training in teamwork, training in self-confidence, training in the rudimentary arts of relating with other people in a common effort. The task of union-building in agriculture awaits certain preliminaries: the breaking down of atomization and alienation, to begin with; and, then, the slow beginnings of mutual awareness, aid, and trust. It is of little effect to exhort a man to "unite" with another man in whom he has no confidence -- or whom he doesn't even know exists.

D. The traditional organizing efforts of the labor movement presuppose that an inchoate social structure already exists. A favored technique of union organizers, for example, is to locate and work with "natural leaders" or "key people" in the group to be organized. This assumes a tentative form of organization already exists below the surface. The job of the union organizer in such settings is, essentially, to articulate, refine, and formalize such basic beginnings. The farm labor movement is likely to result in disappointment so long as it attempts to employ orthodox union techniques in a setting which contains no such basic experience or beginnings.

E. The question is, who shall provide the intermediary steps between total lack of preparation for social participation, and a level of preparation at which union appeals will begin to take on meaning? Is this the task of unions themselves? Perhaps. But unions are preoccupied with a narrow sector of human development: economic. The task we are talking about here is something rather different from anything unions have done in the past. It may be unfair to ask or expect that the labor movement, as such, bear the responsibility for a job of general human development which should properly be that of society itself.

F. There is reason to believe the best way -- perhaps the only way -- to develop a social texture among the socially disinherited and estranged is to begin by identifying felt needs which can be met in the short run, and clearing channels whereby these needs may be met. If such a program is conducted cynically or otherwise improperly, it leads to dependence and manipulation, as in the machine politics of immigrant neighborhoods. But if such a program is conducted properly, it leads to increasing self-awareness,



self-confidence, and ultimately a determination to seek a better life through self-organization. It is this determination, in the final analysis, which decides the fate of union-building efforts. If people are determined to organize, no amount of head-bashing or anything else can stop them. If people are unprepared for and apathetic toward organization, no amount of head-bashing or anything else can forge a living and growing organization.

G. The tendency of agricultural laborers to settle down into "shoestring communities" makes possible, for the first time, the development of the rudimentary forms of interrelatedness which must pre-date the building of a lasting farm workers' union. Where demographic communities exist, sociological communities may follow.

H. But human organization does not follow inevitably or spontaneously from physical proximity. People totally inexperienced in relating with one another must usually be shown that they can work together -- and in what ways -- by someone who has had this type of experience. But if this "someone" comes into the situation as an outsider, saying, in so many words, "I'll show you how things should be done," he will likely have very little success. The approach, rather, should be for this person to serve an apprenticeship as an "insider", so that when he begins to move toward human development and organization, he can say, "Let us try such-and-such..."

I. What are the qualifications of such a human developer or organizer? The principal qualifications would seem to be (1) willingness, not to "serve" disinherit~~ed~~ humanity, but to become a member of this portion of humanity, as a precursor to gaining its rightful inheritance; (2) freedom from other commitments for an extended period of time; (3) indifference to the orthodox career goals of our society -- income, security, prestige; (4) passion for <sup>the</sup> possibilities of the human personality as it unfolds in social contexts. No previous organizational experience is prequired -- indeed, such experience may actually be undesirable, to the extent that traditional "organizing" may inculcate casts of mind quite inappropriate to the problems of basic human development.

J. Where are human developers meeting the above qualifications to be found? Among persons who do not subscribe to society's orthodoxies as to what constitutes a meaningful life. For the most part, such persons are probably to be found among youths and young adults who have not yet been worn down by the myriad pressures and controls through which society enforces its orthodoxies. Among students, and among young working people, it is believed there are substantial numbers who are seeking hungrily (albeit perhaps unconsciously) for ways in which to relate constructively to the rest of mankind and the human condition. Given mechanisms by which they could do so, it is believed that many young people would be happy to make their commitment to human development by themselves becoming agricultural workers and building farm labor organization from within. How many young people? Enough. Numbers are nowhere near so important as the mere fact that someone begins the long task of weaving a social garment where none exists now.



## II. Rural Development Association: the Plan in Brief.

On the one hand, our society contains a number of persons whose lives are incomplete because dedicated essentially to self-centered and materialistic goals. Some of these people would like to exchange such lives for lives more significant. On the other hand, our society contains a number of persons whose lives are incomplete because they are atomized and alienated from their fellow men. They are in a real sense dehumanized, since men do not become men fully except through relating with other men.

It is proposed that a system be created within which idealistic young people and estranged agricultural "shoestringers" could come together in a process which would bring completeness into both their lives. It is proposed that college students, disillusioned "organization men", and others whose lives seem without savor, be given the opportunity -- and that word is used advisedly -- to become agricultural workers and to live in "shoestring communities" themselves. As they came to know these "communities" (which are not yet communities in any real sense), and as they came to be known and trusted by their fellow farm laborers, they could begin to identify the basic sorts of activities and concerns around which their neighbors might start to coalesce in rudimentary forms of human organization. From rudimentary organisms more advanced organisms grow. If the preliminary forms are viable, subsequent development is not only possible -- it is inevitable. Human beings, given a taste of the fruits of social participation, are not content to return to anonymity and demoralization. They come to demand a full share of justice -- and nothing less, it would seem, will gain it for them. Social justice, for better or for worse, is not a gift freely given by society. Every group, it appears, must demand and win its share.

Through a Rural Development Association, two goals would be achieved: first, farm workers, among whom few social and psychological bonds now exist, will forge such bonds. From this, all manner of subsequent accomplishments can and will flow -- including unionization. Second, young men and women will find self-realization, not by "serving" someone "less fortunate" than they, but by serving themselves through human development in which they are totally involved. The problems and prospects of creating social structures within which the human personality can flourish are, in this view, essentially the same for farm workers and college students alike -- and, for that matter, for everyone else in the mid-20th Century.

## III. Miscellaneous.

A. RDA, it should be noted, will be addressed, at least at the outset, to all the people of California's "shoestring communities" and rural-urban fringes. Most, but not all, of these people are agricultural workers. It seems neither desirable nor feasible to attempt to separate farm laborers from their neighbors in the basic tasks of building collective identity. As organization passes into its later stages, greater emphasis can be laid upon the problems of particular occupations -- notably farm labor.

B. Although RDA will do good, it will not be "do gooder", in the sense that that implies dilettantes from outside, or in the sense that that implies any lack of militancy. Indeed, RDA will hopefully be a good deal more militant (in situations calling for militancy) than the AFSC, Migrant Ministry, CSO, and other organizations which at one time or another have carried on activities somewhat similar to those of RDA's human developers. It is to be hoped, for



example, that RDA can utilize the techniques of non-violent direct action, which have proven highly effective among a number of other groups whose situations have resembled those of America's farm laborers in many ways.

C. RDA workers will move from other occupations into farm labor. In so doing, they will be setting themselves squarely against a general tendency. This dramatic and symbolic act will, among other things, constitute a clear and direct challenge to the pernicious myth that farm labor is intrinsically repellent. RDA workers will demonstrate, not by words, but by actions, that they conceive farm labor to be intrinsically honorable. Attitudes follow actions. As the attitudes implicit in this action spread, organizability will be signally enhanced.

D. Eventually, an agricultural workers' union must, of course, include all agricultural workers -- including transient and casual single males, migrant families, and foreign contract workers (if any remain by the time a viable union is established). The present plan assumes that union-building must rest upon a foundation of the most stable, rather than the least stable, elements within the working force. In the case of California agriculture, the farm labor families concentrated in "shacktowns" and "shoestring communities" are not only the most stable, they are the most numerous and the most important element in the State's farm labor force.

E. The goal cannot be, at this time, economic or political reforms, all of which require massive collective action, and all of which inevitably call forth equally massive counter-action. Rather, the goal for the moment must be sociological reform, for at least the following reasons: (a) every other type of reform presupposes that the people involved have completed their ABC's of living and working together; (b) elementary training in social action is so modest in scope that it is unlikely to arouse the attention or opposition of those who would violently oppose more advanced forms of social action. Before people will stick together through the long and <sup>seemingly</sup> heartbreaking task of gaining recognition of a farm labor union, and gaining the benefits of unionism, they must have some experience in sticking together in less demanding and overwhelming pursuits. The fabric of collective action is not created at a single, bold stroke, but is woven very slowly and painstakingly, of slender strands.

F. RDA points toward a farm workers' union. But it points toward a great many other things as well. The goals, in the last analysis, are those of human development: spontaneity, creativity, ability to relate constructively with other human beings, ability to relate pridefully with one's employment, respect for one's own worth and integrity. These goals, and the techniques by which they may be reached, have application far beyond California agriculture. RDA may be thought of as a testing ground for a type of social change needed in much of the rest of the United States -- and most of the rest of the world. Farm laborers have been despoiled of most material advantages, comforts, and assurances. But, even more importantly, they have been despoiled of part of their essential humanity. In this, they are at one with the South African Negro, the South Carolina Negro, the Mexican bracero, the people of every underdeveloped part of the planet. "Underdevelopment," in our view, has little reference to technology. It has reference to man's capacities for humanness, of which technology comprises only a part. The goal is not better machines, groceries, or hospitals. The goal is better human beings.



IV. Functions and activities:

- A. Information about rights and obligations under State and Federal laws; assistance in dealings with government agencies.
  - 1. Farm Placement Service
  - 2. Division of Labor Law Enforcement
  - 3. Division of Industrial Welfare
  - 4. Division of Housing
  - 5. Division of Industrial Safety
  - 6. Social Security Administration
  - 7. Others
- B. Employment problems:
  - 1. Worker registration
  - 2. Job finding
  - 3. Job training
  - 4. Formation of crews
  - 5. Training of crew leaders
  - 6. Stabilization of employment (seasonal and annual worker plans)
- C. Housing:
  - 1. Maintenance of files of families looking for housing, and of housing available (both rentals and sales).
  - 2. Information regarding zoning restrictions and building codes.
  - 3. Unsegregated housing.
  - 4. "Redevelopment" problems.
  - 5. Information regarding employee housing (i.e., labor camps), and public housing.
  - 6. Cooperative housing developments -- i.e., management of worker-owned and operated camps.
- D. Political:
  - 1. Voter registration.
  - 2. Selection and sponsorship of candidates.
  - 3. Transportation to the polls.
  - 4. Political rallies.
  - 5. Letter-writing campaigns concerning specific issues.
- E. Social, recreational.
  - 1. Dances
  - 2. Motion pictures
  - 3. Games and sports
  - 4. Other
- F. Educational:
  - 1. Book and magazine exchanges
  - 2. Forums and discussions.
  - 3. Worker classes under Adult Education
- G. Health and medical:
  - 1. Workmen's Compensation cases
  - 2. County Hospital cases
  - 3. County Health Department: preventive medical services
  - 4. Maintenance of "dispensaries"
  - 5. Group health insurance plans



H. Ladies' auxiliaries:

1. Canning and sewing bees
2. Baby sitters' exchange
3. Rummage sales, bazaars
4. Other

I. Cooperative activities:

1. Cooperative buying
2. Cooperative selling
3. Credit unions

J. Formation of local citizens' committees.

Involvement of the remainder of the community in the rural-urban "fringe," and vice versa. Rather than waiting for the relatively "developed" portion of the community to become interested in the "underdeveloped," the disorganized will evidently have to organize the organized!

V. Personnel:

A. Full-time rural developers.

1. Either men or women, for the most part between the ages of approximately 18 and 25.
2. Preferably single, unless spouse is prepared to make an identical commitment.
3. Preferably having completed education.
4. Prepared to make a commitment of at least two or three years.

B. Part-time or associate rural developers.

1. Either men or women, probably somewhat younger, on the average, than full-time developers.
2. Prepared to make commitments of 2-3 weeks to 2-3 months; summer vacations from school; vacations from regular jobs; etc.

C. Assistant developers.

Local persons with full-time jobs, preferably in agriculture, who volunteer whatever time they can spare in evenings and on weekends.

D. Field director.

1. Trains local developers and coordinates their activities.
2. Spanish-speaking, although not necessarily natively.
3. Unmarried status a virtual necessity, as will be in the field constantly.
4. Must have automobile (preferably station wagon, microbus, or pick-up).

E. General director.

1. Research, publicity, fiscal management, planning and general direction.
2. Preferably married, without children: wife to do secretarial work.
3. Must have typewriter, other appropriate equipment and supplies.



## VI. Structure.

- A. As decentralized in structure as consistent with effective accomplishment. Minimum of policies and programs binding on local groups.
- B. The basic unit of organization should be the city block, or rural equivalent. When blocks have been organized, they may be knit together into neighborhood organizations. Where appropriate, these neighborhood units should combine to form township or area organizations -- e.g., the "rurban" fringe of Greater Stockton. Such area groups might well work together with other area groups in the same ecological region -- i.e., the contiguous region in which essentially the same types of crops are grown -- as in the lower East Side of the San Joaquin Valley. Finally, coordination of all these several levels of activity will be provided at the State level.
- C. Periodic meetings of all local developers will be held: not for the purpose of consolidating a "party line," but for the purpose of "cross-fertilization" of ideas and techniques.
- D. Board of Trustees.
  1. To provide broad direction, vision, and technical advice.
  2. All trustees to be persons who have had personal experience in community organization.
  3. All ~~xxx~~ trustees to be persons able to meet together fairly frequently for the purposes of RDA.
  4. Examples:
    - a. Rev. Ralph Duggan
    - b. Cesar Chavez
    - c. Bard McAllister
    - d. Fred Ross
- E. Advisory Board.
  1. To ensure that other organizations are informed of RDA's activities (while not necessarily endorsing them in detail), and to obtain a spectrum of advice (while not necessarily accepting it in detail).
  2. Examples of relevant organizations and agencies:
    - a. Catholic Rural Life Conference
    - b. Migrant Ministry
    - c. American Friends Service Committee
    - d. Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO
    - e. California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO
    - f. United Packinghouse Workers of America, AFL-CIO
    - g. National Agricultural Workers Union, AFL-CIO
    - h. Catholic Social Welfare Conference
    - i. Bishops Committee for the Spanish Speaking
    - j. Bishops Committee for Migrant Labor
    - k. National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor
    - l. California Citizens Committee for Agricultural Labor
    - m. Community Service Organization
    - n. Giannini Foundation
    - o. Governor's Committee



## VII. Training.

- A. All developers must spend an apprenticeship of at least one month of full-time work in fields or orchards.
- B. One week of intensive instruction in a human development "school" conducted by persons with extensive experience in this field, such as Fred Ross of the Industrial Areas Foundation.
- C. At least two weeks of on-the-job training, under the direct supervision of the RDA's field director.
- D. Periodic re-visits by the field director.
- E. Special consultation at any time, in the event of emergencies -- although the ideal is local developers who can function effectively with a maximum of independence and a minimum of supervision.

## VIII. Financing.

A. Part-time organizers and organizers' assistants will receive no financial assistance from RDA. They will room and board with farm labor families, and will meet whatever expenses may be incurred by working in the fields.

B. Full-time organizers will receive a maximum of \$100 per month, which will be supplemented by work in the fields as needed. They also will room and board with farm labor families.

C. Field director: \$200 per month, plus actual expenses in the field.

D. General director: \$300 per month.

E. Overhead:

1. All offices will be located in private homes.
2. Minimum investment in permanent equipment.
3. Travel by all but the field director will be held to a minimum.

F. Sources of funds:

1. Contributions:
  - a. Labor unions
  - b. Foundations
  - c. Churches
  - d. Voluntary agencies
  - e. Individuals
2. Special events: dances, rummage sales, etc.
3. Donations of equipment and supplies will be accepted.
4. There will be no dues, at least in the formative stages of each local organization. There will be no "per capita" levied upon any level of the organization by any other level of the organization.

## IX. Relationships with other organizations.

A. Religious groups.

RDA will have no direct connection with the Migrant Ministry, Catholic Rural Life Conference, AFSC, etc., but will consult with them constantly. The pilot projects sponsored by religious groups in Tulare County, Mendota, and Westley-Patterson, can and should be coordinated with the activities of RDA.



B. Community Service Organization (CSO).

RDA will somewhat resemble the Farm Labor Committees which CSO has set up in certain areas. RDA, however, will not be limited to the particular lingual and ethnic group with which the CSO works. RDA, furthermore, will place more emphasis on block and neighborhood work, rather than viewing the city or town as the basic building unit.

C. Citizens Committees.

There will be an organic connection in communities in which RDA itself has been instrumental in forming Citizens Committees for Rural Development (or whatever they may be called). RDA's relationships with the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, and the California Citizens' Committee for Agricultural Labor, depends largely upon the attitudes which these organizations take toward work at the local level, and toward the creation of local citizens' committees.

D. The labor movement.

1. No direct connection in the formative stages. This for at least two reasons:

a. The labor movement can hardly be expected to become intimately concerned with the sorts of functions RDA will carry out in the early phases of neighborhood development.

b. For the labor movement to become too deeply involved too soon would in all likelihood narrow the base on which later organization work could be built.

2. At such time as viable "locals" have been developed (and this decision will rest with the members of each "local", themselves), union organizers will be invited to come in, and will be given full access to membership rolls, RDA meetings, and so forth. RDA itself, however, will not collect union dues, or perform the other legitimate tasks of union organizers.

3. It seems likely that RDA will continue to meet needs even after union locals have been chartered. RDA will therefore continue to exist as an autonomous organization in such areas -- continuing in the never-completed task of general human development at the same time the union pursues the tasks of economic development. In such cases, there will no doubt be considerable overlapping in leadership and virtual identity in membership. But RDA will not be competitive with union locals: there will be a clear division of labor.

Stockton, California,  
April 14, 1960